

VIRGINIA

WILDLIFE

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ONE DOLLAR



Out on a Limb

There is nothing quite so satisfying as watching an old Clint Eastwood western. For a good Southerner, it doesn't get any better than "The Outlaw Josey Wales." Now, that was real living. It was a time when men strapped six-guns on their hips and silver spurs on their boots, rode half-broke horses, rescued beautiful women, and defended any breach of honor with their lives. The world was one raw open space bounded only by the mind. You could have anything, be anything. There were no laws to bind or protect you. It was survival of the fittest. The weak-eyed, weak-kneed, and evil-minded were culled out. Only the best survived.

Never mind what life then was really like. Let's instead remember it as a time when men were men and women were...er, well, never mind about that, either. Life, undoubtedly, was good. We didn't have office buildings to spend half our lives in, worries about real estate, stocks or weight loss programs. We didn't have air conditioning. Life *must* have been good.

But it really wasn't. We weren't very nice to each other in the old days. We had oil barons and the Teapot Dome scandal; we had railroads built with the blood of thousands of Chinese workers. Mining companies cheated their workers into desperate poverty, industries hired children to work in sweatshops, and we once believed in slavery. Human life was a commodity to be used, abused, and replaced. It was, indeed, survival of the fittest.

Things have changed a great deal. We are much more compassionate toward each other (at least in our part of the world). We've created rules and regulations to guard against our excesses and our abuses, and we no longer believe that business is exempt from any moral code of con-

duct. We have become kinder to one another, responding to help the needy among us without recompense, as the latest relief effort in south Florida has shown. We are healthier, live longer, smell better, and are much more comfortable, well-fed, and well-clothed than we used to be.

Still, we are not happy. The Ivan Boeskys, the Donald Trumps, the Charles Keatings, and the Exxon Valdez spoil our paradise. Too many people, too much buck-passing, too much asphalt, too little time. We are still battling our demons. We can't help it. It's part of our nature. We are still a selfish lot.

What a lot of effort and energy it takes to act unselfishly, though. Perhaps that is why our greatest heroes are those who have lived compassionately and unselfishly, for we all seem to realize how much courage and strength it takes to be good. Indeed, we all too often go about our business clumsily, following our own selfish nature until enough people point out how horrible and disagreeable our actions are and finally create a law to save us from serving time in the hereafter.

And that is the wonderful thing about our democracy. It's much easier for us onlookers to look upon a polluted stream, a ruined forest, an asphalted meadow and cry "foul!" than it is for the person making a living doing it. In fact, it's always easier to act out of the noble side of our nature when it doesn't concern us directly. And, since the power of our government is invested in the people as a whole, and not in a handful of individuals who might profit from acting selfishly, we have the power to make amends. We *can* make people sacrifice their own self-interest for the common good.

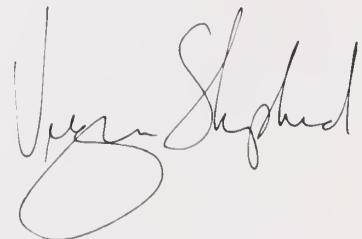
Fortunately, we've matured this far in our society by doing just that.

The problem is, it's never quick and never easy. There's always a price to pay for cavorting with our demons. Normally, we pay for rules and regulations that protect the common good with drawn-out suffering, irrevocable loss and spilled blood.

Nevertheless, there's the hope that should keep us going, those of us who too often despair that we have probably fouled up the Earth beyond repair. It helps to remember that throughout human history we've been haunted by people who have committed unspeakable acts out of selfish interests. But in little over 200 years, we *have* righted some terrible wrongs in terms of human justice and equality. We haven't progressed nearly so far in terms of the injustices we heap daily upon poor, aging Mother Earth, but knowing the road to the common good has been travelled before helps to keep the faith.

It's a muddy, bloody, and wearily long road, but when things get desperate at least we have the Teddy Roosevelts, the Aldo Leopolds, the John Muirs, and the Rachel Carsons whispering words of encouragement to us. I can hear them now: "So you think you've got it bad now? Let me tell you something..." The maddening thing is that they'd probably end up telling us to just hang on, 'cause things *never* happen today. But you *know* what sports cars, fast food, and fax machines have done to us all...

Forget the wait. Just give me a fast horse, some silver spurs, and wide open spaces. I swear I'd know how to live right.



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A squirrel is not just a squirrel. The fox squirrels of Virginia's mountains and the Shenandoah Valley look, act, and live differently than their gray cousins. See page 22 for information to help the hunter understand and appreciate this worthy quarry; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.



Grayson Highlands State Park in southwest Virginia is just one of the many jewels in Virginia's state park system. Turn to page 4 for a closer look at these treasures; photo by Gary W. Carter.

Cover: White-tailed doe; photo by Bill Lea.

Back Cover: Fall leaves; photo by Michael McCormack.

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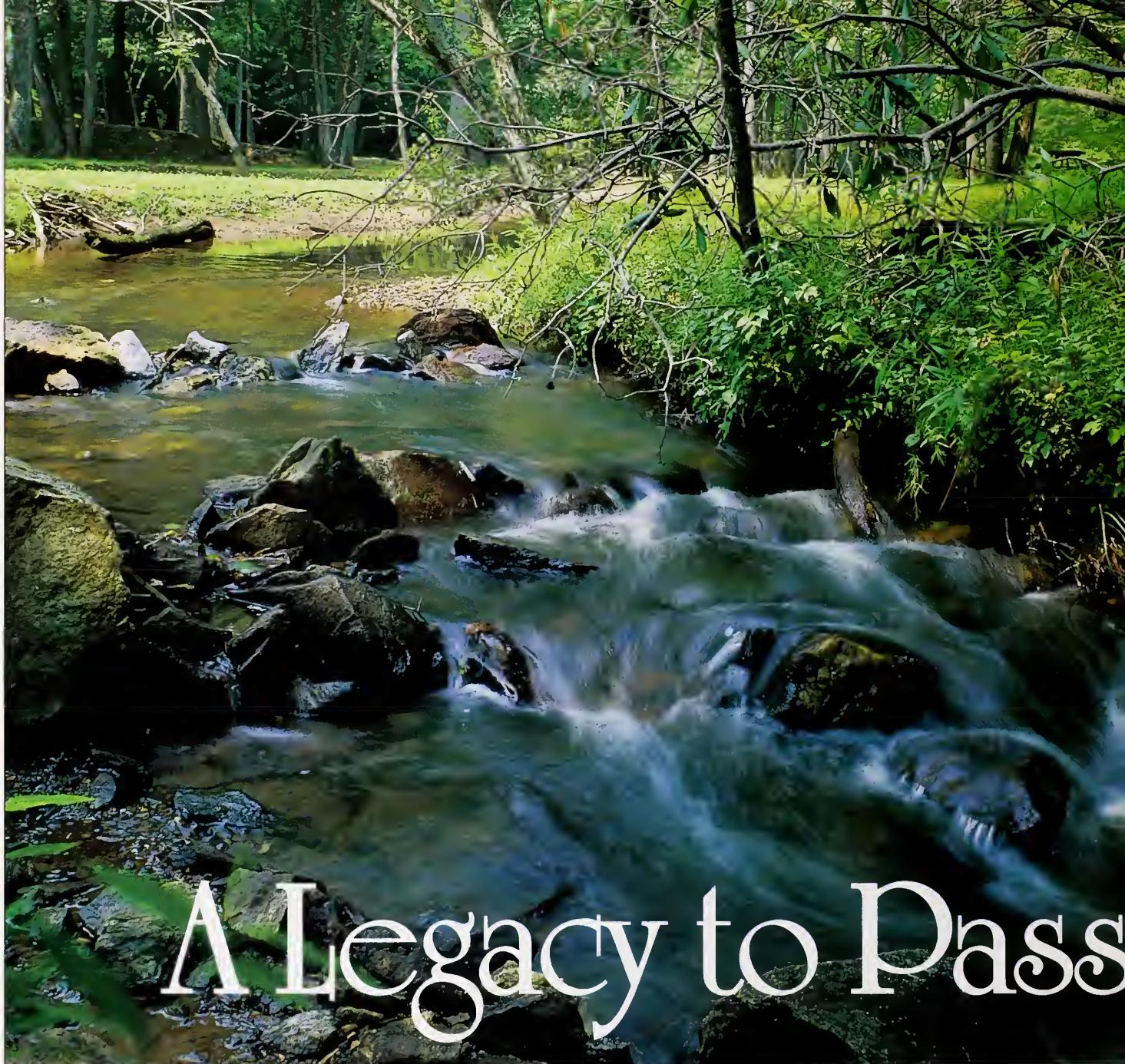
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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources



A Legacy to Pass

Our state parks system is a wonderful mix of natural, recreational, and historical treasures. Whether you love to fish, hike, or simply enjoy the outdoors, Virginia's state parks are to be treasured. They are a legacy we've inherited, and one we need to preserve.

by Bob Gooch

A gentle May breeze caressed my face and rippled the broad surface of the Potomac River. Tiny waves lapped at my bare feet. I glanced down at the modest stringer of fish glistening through the thin water, and as I did so a sharp tap on my line warned me I might add to my catch.

White perch. The Potomac is a good river for these feisty and tasty little members of the true bass family.

The beach was narrow here, but up the river a short distance my wife and daughters were enjoying the broad beach of Westmoreland State Park in the county of the same name. I'd left them there to bake in the sun.

Light spinning rod and a half dozen lures in hand, I had slipped away to a modest little point that jutted out from the shore. Behind me a steep, eroded, cliff rose abruptly from the beach, and behind it was the picturesque 1,355-acre state park. We were camped there, and those white



On

perch would be consumed around our evening campfire.

Camping, fishing, and swimming. Big attractions in state parks across Virginia. But there's much more—bird watching (even for eagles), boating and canoeing, bridle trails, hiking, picnicking, rental cabins for those who don't camp, nature study, and yes, even limited hunting.

Comfortable campgrounds, however, are a major attraction. Family camping. There's no better place for a family vacation.

What kind of vacation do you prefer? One high in the mountains, the seashore, a big lake—a smaller one? Among the 37 parks, natural areas and historical sites, you will find the outdoors that fits your whim.

For the mountain lover there is Grayson Highlands State Park in Grayson County near 5,729-foot Mount Rogers, the highest point in Virginia, Douthat on the Alleghany-Bath County border, Claytor Lake in Pulaski, Hungry Mother in Smyth, and Natural Tunnel in Scott. All have modern campgrounds with showers and toilets. Sky Meadows, with primitive camping only, is located near the Appalachian Trail along the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains on the Clarke-Fauquier County border.

The seashore appeals to many and no park is more popular than Seashore State Park on the Chesapeake Bay in the city of Virginia Beach. False Cape State Park on the ocean south of the Virginia Beach resort strip is more remote, and accessible only by boat across Back Bay or by biking or hiking through Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. It's remote and undeveloped, but a real gem where you can crawl into your sleeping bag lulled by the murmur of the nearby surf. It's primitive camping at its best. The new Kiptopeke State Park at the tip of the Eastern Shore offers a new opportunity for a variety of seashore activities.

Scattered across that broad region between the mountains and the seashore known as the piedmont

there are developed campgrounds at Bear Creek Lake in Cumberland County, Fairy Stone in Patrick, Holliday Lake in Appomattox, Occoneechee in Mecklenburg, Staunton River on the Halifax-Mecklenburg border, and Twin Lakes in Prince Edward County. There is also primitive camping at Smith Mountain Lake in Bedford County.

Housekeeping cabins are available by reservation at Claytor Lake, Douthat, Hungry Mother, Fairy Stone, Staunton River, Seashore, and Westmoreland State Parks. In all except Claytor Lake, log cabins built back in the 1930's take you back a half century in time.

Maybe a big lake with good fishing is your choice for a vacation. The state parks offer access to four of the largest in Virginia. Claytor Lake is on 4,485-acre Claytor Lake, Fairy Stone is minutes from 2,800-acre Philpott, and Occoneechee and Staunton River are on 50,000-acre Buggs Island, Virginia's largest. Smith Mountain Lake, with its primitive camping, is on the shores of 20,000-acre Smith Mountain Lake. There are launching ramps at Claytor Lake, Occoneechee, Staunton River, and Smith Mountain Lake, and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers has ramps on Philpott Lake. While there is no camping at Lake Anna State Park, there is a launching ramp that offers good access to Lake Anna.

For some, the intimacy of a small lake is more appealing. They like to get away from fast bass boats and water-skiers. Yes, there are small

Left: Fairy Stone State Park.

Right: Fishing for white perch at Westmoreland State Park is a popular pastime; photos by Dwight Dyke.



lakes such as Bear Creek, Douthat, Fairy Stone, Holliday, Hungry Mother, Fairy Stone, Pocahontas, and Twin Lakes. Fairy Stone, at 168 acres, is the largest.

Other state parks offer access to various kinds of water. Seashore State Park, for example, has a boat launching ramp on Broad Bay with access to the Chesapeake Bay through Lynnhaven Inlet. Westmoreland has a modern ramp on the Potomac River, and so does Leesylva-



nia. At York River there is a ramp on the York River, and at Mason Neck an unimproved ramp on the Potomac which can accommodate canoes and light boats. Kiptopeke boasts both a fishing pier and launching ramp on the Chesapeake Bay.

Boating, camping, fishing, and rustic cabins, but there's much more.

Hiking along winding trails appeals to many, particularly camping families. Just about all of the parks have good systems of trails. Ask for a map as you register. But for a real hike, consider the relatively new New River Trail State Park. Called a linear park or greenway, it follows an abandoned railroad along the New River for 37 miles. It's a great place to bike, hike, or ride horses. Hiking the trail does not necessarily mean starting at one end and covering its entire length. There is access at Byllesby Dam, Draper, Fries, Galax, Pulaski, and at the Shot Tower Historical State Park.

Across the state, in the natural area of Seashore State Park, over 19 miles of trails offer the exploration of a unique environment of lagoons,



plants, and trees found only in this part of Virginia. Some of the flora is typical of that found far to the south. For hiking near the highest peaks in Virginia, there is Grayson Highlands State Park with trails that lead to overlooks, waterfalls, and an alpine environment that contrasts sharply with the swamps and wetlands of

Clockwise from top left: Wildflowers at Lake Anna State Park complement the swimming and sunbathing to be enjoyed at the area; photo by Stewart Waller. Chippokes Plantation State Park preserves an antebellum mansion and a working farm of yesteryear for visitors; photo by Dwight Dyke. Douthat Lake State Park has one of the most popular fishing lakes in the state parks system; photo by Stewart Waller.



Seashore. Finally, there are False Cape and Sky Meadows that are best enjoyed by hiking.

While several parks offer bridle trails, horses can be rented only at Claytor Lake and Hungry Mother. Grayson Highlands does not have horses for rent, but many enjoy riding their own horses along the many miles of trails. Unique is a horse camping area with stables and a parking area for horse trailers.

The preservation of nature undisturbed by man is a basic goal of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Thus, though hiking is generally

allowed at state parks, there are exceptions. The Caledon Natural Area on the Potomac River in King George County is the summer home to the largest concentration of bald eagles on the East Coast, and hiking is not allowed in the eagle area, though limited guided tours are offered. False Cape is another unique area,



At Seashore State Park (top and above), tent camping and cookouts near the beach contribute to a "family affair," while the Spanish moss adorning the trees along trails threading through a beautiful swamp add to the magic of the area.

Left: Log cabins built back in the 1930s take you back in time at Fairy Stone State Park; photos by Dwight Dyke.

one that offers the opportunity to witness huge migrations of birds. Mason Neck in Fairfax County is a favorite of birdwatchers. Weekend eagle counts are popular. York River in James City County protects a rare and delicate environment where fresh and saltwater meet, and Kiptopeke has been the site of a bird banding station for almost 30 years.

Most of the state parks offer history and nature programs during the vacation season, but there are also

those parks that exist primarily to preserve our culture or heritage. One is Natural Tunnel State Park where, over thousands of centuries, an 850-foot long tunnel as high as a 10-story building has been carved through a limestone ridge. Shot Tower Historical State Park near the New River in Wythe County preserves a shot tower built over 150 years ago to help arm the early settlers in southwest Virginia. The Southwest Virginia Museum in Scott County chronicles the history of this once frontier region.

Chippokes Plantation State Park on the James River gives visitors a look at an antebellum mansion and a working farm of yesteryear. George Washington's Grist Mill Historical State Park in Fairfax County displays the operation of the grist mill of our first president, a farmer in private life, while Leesylvania State Park in Prince William County was once the home of the famous Lee family of Virginia.

Back to fishing. Serious fishermen tend to overlook the angling opportunities in the state parks. They may exist in the parks themselves or in nearby waters where a comfortable campground or cabin can serve as a fishing headquarters.

Probably the best-known fishing lake within a state park is little 50-acre Douthat. It is stocked weekly from the opening of the trout season through Labor Day. The angler is assured there are always trout to be caught. Some of the best fishing comes after Labor Day when the water cools and the crowds thin out. Stocking is discontinued, but there is a good holdover of fish from the summer releases.

Fairy Stone is primarily a warmwater lake that offers fishing for largemouth bass and panfish, and as recently as this spring it received a release of walleyes. Hungry Mother offers a wide

variety of fishing for such species as muskie, northern pike, and walleyes in addition to native fish such as bass, bluegills, catfish, and crappie. Bear Creek, Holliday, Pocahontas, and Twin Lakes hold bass and panfish.

Probably more important to most anglers are the access and boat launching facilities on larger waters such as the Potomac River and popular fishing lakes such as Anna, Buggs Island, Claytor, and Smith Mountain. In most instances anglers can camp in the parks with their families and enjoy the fishing. Grayson Highlands serves as a fine headquarters for fishing some of the prime trout streams in the general area. New River Trail offers easy access to the New River noted for its smallmouth bass fishing. Surf fishermen can fish the Atlantic Ocean from False Cape or wade into the lower Chesapeake Bay from Seashore. New Kiptopeke offers both surf and pier fishing in the Chesapeake Bay. These are just



All across the Commonwealth, state parks provide recreation, scenic beauty and opportunities for families to experience the outdoors. Clockwise from top: Grayson Highlands State Park; photo by Gary W. Carter. Holliday Lake State Park in Appomattox County; photo by Dwight Dyke. Smith Mountain Lake State Park; photo by Dwight Dyke.



some of the possibilities. The imaginative angler can study the park system and come up with a great variety of fishing ideas.

Although hunting is not allowed on all state parks, there are limited hunting lands in Fairy Stone, Sailor's Creek, Grayson Highlands, False Cape, and Oconeechee due to cooperative agreements between the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and DCR. Camping will be extended at Bear Creek Lake through November 29 to accommodate hunters.

For over half a century, people from all walks of life have enjoyed Virginia's state parks, nurturing and balancing their mental and physical health—and becoming better and more productive citizens.

The \$95 million Parks and Recreational Facilities Bond will be one of three on the ballot this November. Also listed will be bonds for state mental health facilities and higher education institutions. Monies in the parks bond will be used to:

- Acquire 10 natural areas. Natural areas protect rare and endangered species while providing public access and environmental education.
- Acquire four new state parks along the upper James River, the lower Rappahannock River, the Shenandoah River, and in Lee County.
- Fund facility improvements in existing state parks and natural areas to meet health and safety standards, provide resource protection and improve visitor service.

The value of our sprawling system of state parks is priceless. It preserves values we hold dear. But these values are being threatened as improvements and additions to the system lag because of the lack of funds. Long-range plans are on the drawing boards waiting for funds to implement them. The citizens of Virginia will have an opportunity to provide these funds when they go to the polls in November. The 1992 Parks and Recreational Facilities Bond referendum will address the future of this unique system which protects and preserves our outdoor treasures and our historical and natural legacy.

We owe our children and their children that legacy, a rich legacy to pass on. □

Bob Gooch is an outdoor newspaper columnist and author of several books on hunting and fishing. He lives in Troy, near Charlottesville.

Tree

by Steve Ausband

I had picked the spot carefully. It was at the edge of a large stand of hardwoods—hickories and white oaks mostly—just where the big woods bordered a stand of thick pines, with some tangles of gum, poplar, and briars mixed in. I knew the deer fed in the hardwoods, but simply picking an oak at random and hanging a portable stand on it seemed to be trusting too much to luck. The pines helped. I figured the deer would like the cover of that thicket, and they could browse on the greenbriar and honeysuckle before walking into the more open oak forest to find acorns. I located trails along the edges of the pines, and twice while I was scouting I saw deer moving into the thicket. It was a good spot, and I was in it for the second day in a row. The first day I had seen no deer, but I thought they would come.

I had hung the portable stand 14 feet up the trunk of a forked red oak, with the horizontal part of the stand between the two trunks. From the ground it was almost invisible, unless you already knew where to look. A cedar tree sheltered me on one side, and as I leaned against the oak trunk I felt myself growing into the shadows cast by the cedar. I would be hard to see, unless I moved at the wrong time. By late afternoon I had seen a dozen squirrels, some of which



Stand Smarts

used the upper limbs of my oak as part of their route to and from the big woods. One of them came down the trunk to my eye level, watched me intently for a moment from a range of three feet, then disappeared. I saw the first deer, a doe, an hour before dark.

She was slipping cat-like along the edges of the big trees, keeping within a few yards of the thicket. From time to time she would stop and look round, remaining motionless for long minutes. She put her head down, perhaps to find an acorn, and I studied her. She was small but healthy looking. A few more steps took her almost directly beneath the stand. Taking her now would be hard; the angle was too steep, and the view of her vitals too narrow. I decided I did not want to take her anyway. She walked out away from the stand to investigate something and stood there, oblivious to my presence. Nice picture, I thought. Another one for the memory file. The buck came later.

I heard him first, moving almost noiselessly back in the tangle of vines and low pine trees—a steadier sound than the scurrying of squirrels, but almost that light. Then I saw a flank, and the movement of his feet. The light was fading, and the thicket was heavy with shadows, but I could see his antlers. He was big, bigger than anything else I had ever taken with a bow, but his direction would not take him close enough to my tree. Soon it would be too dark to see.

I had left my grunt call at the house, and I wasn't even sure the rut was in yet. "There's nothing to lose," I thought. "He's leaving anyway." I grunted softly, trying to sound like an amorous buck and get the big boy's territorial instincts aroused.

"Unnh," I said, feeling slightly foolish. He stopped and looked back. I tried another grunt. "Unnh." I did not think I sounded much like a deer, but I was willing to try. To my surprise, he turned. "Unnh, Unnnnh," I

said. "I am entertaining your most beautiful doe. Two of them. Five. Ha-ha! Unnnnnnnh!"

The buck raised his head, straight in my direction. Then he began walking toward me. He stopped just behind the cedar, waiting. I could no longer see him, and it was getting dark, but I knew he was there, just a few yards away. "Unnnh!" I said softly. Then he was under my tree.

I could see him raise his head, then lower it. He was directly beneath me, so that I had to lean out to draw the bow. I could hear my own heart beating, and I thought surely he could

The bowhunter must consider the placement of his or her stand carefully, keeping factors like wind direction, height, cover, and light in mind.

too. But I couldn't take him with the bow. I couldn't see the sights; I could barely see the deer. The shot would not be right. I waited. He waited. After a few minutes I heard him leave, moving softly into the darkness. Then I left too. I had worked hard to find the place and put up the stand, and I had gotten stiff and sore with the hours of waiting. I had seen two deer and had taken no shots, but it had been a very fine afternoon. I could hardly wait until morning, so I could go out again.

That's bowhunting.

One of the best places to see deer on my farm is from the lofty vantage point of an old, forked gum tree overlooking three acres of field and pasture. There are hardwoods to the northwest of the field, a small pond, thick pines and brush for shelter on two sides, and there is an abundance

of clover in the pasture. Some years I grow a few soybeans and a little grain sorghum at one end of the field. I have taken several nice bucks there with a rifle, and one can watch deer from that tree almost any afternoon in the early fall. It is, however, a lousy place for an archer's deer stand.

A bowhunter doesn't need to see a lot of deer in a clover field or slipping along the tree line 60 yards away. He needs to see one deer close up, he needs to see it when it is not alarmed, he needs to be at a proper angle to it, and he needs to have enough cover around him so that the considerable motion involved in drawing a hunting bow is shielded from the deer's view. I have never taken a single deer from that "perfect" tree with a bow, nor has anyone else who has hunted with me on the property. My bow stands are in different places, at different angles, on smaller fields, or in thicker cover. Here's why.

Closeness: As the deodorant and toothpaste commercials say, close-up is when it counts. Obviously, the first thing a bowhunter needs to worry about is positioning his stand where he thinks he will see deer in range. For most of us, in range means inside 30 yards. Sure, you can hit a deer-sized target fairly reliably at longer range, but can you put the arrow just where you want it, at a good angle, in fading light? Can you do it every time? Let's consider 30 yards a good maximum range, and then let's practice a lot. Besides, one of the greatest thrills in hunting is being so close to the deer that you can see the little drops of dew on his coat or watch the mist from his nostrils on a cold morning—even when you decide not to take the shot.

Angles are important to a bow hunter, and being close to the animal allows the hunter to determine the angle much more precisely. The problem of choosing just the right angle for the shot is compounded as the light fades. Deer seem to melt and

fade into their surroundings as the light fades, and a hunter must be very close to an animal in dim light in order to judge angles.

Height: I have seen guys who put stands in trees so high I get nosebleeds just thinking about climbing up there. One friend, who always hunts up in the clouds, says he thinks he has the edge because both his movements and his smell are harder for the deer to detect. He may be right; he certainly brings home his share of venison. On the other hand, some bowhunters regard a stand over 15 feet or so to be unnecessarily high. They have a very good reason for staying relatively close to the ground. Deer look distressingly narrow when viewed from a lofty tree stand. The higher you go, the more acute the angle to the deer becomes, and the deer looks skinnier and skinnier, until finally the view of heart/lung area becomes a view of the deer's back. The steep angle can turn the smallest error in aim or the slightest bobble in release into a costly mistake.

One of my hunting partners, Richard Rowland, tells me he likes a stand no more than 12 or 15 feet off the ground. To guard against the possibility of being seen or scented in this relatively low perch, he uses a cover scent (fox scent, generally, since there are a lot of foxes where he deer hunts), good camouflage, including paint on his face and hands, and brush cut from nearby cedars and tied around the stand to help block his outline—which brings us to the next consideration.

Cover: You don't have to bow-hunt very long before you realize that just getting close enough to hit your target is only part of the problem. There is an enormous amount of movement involved in drawing a bow, and many an opportunity has been lost because a hunter's movements gave him away. Deer have a wonderful sense of hearing and a sense of smell that borders on the supernatural, but they don't see stationary objects well if there is a little cover around. Let the object move,

however, especially if the object is moving enough to draw a hunting bow, and all the deer in the area go on instant alert. Most successful bowhunters find a way to blend in with the shadows and tree trunks around them, and they utilize whatever natural cover they have to hide their motion. I talked to several who always remain on their feet while on a bow stand, figuring that the movement involved in rising to a shooting position would be too revealing. For those who must pass the hours in a seated position, cover is even more essential.

Hanging a stand on a tree at the edge of a clearing, a small field, or near a particularly good-looking intersection of trails in the hardwoods might put the hunter close to the action, but leave him unable to move without revealing himself. By sticking the stand back a little in the shadows, among other trees and thick vegetation, and doing just enough trimming to allow clearance to draw the bow and make the shot, the hunter increases his chances for success considerably.

For the bowhunter, stands placed close to trails that skirt or cross thickets near mast-producing hardwoods or browse-rich, grown-over fields can be particularly good for two reasons. In the first place, deer moving in daylight hours like the shelter of the thicker vegetation. They seem to feel more comfortable when they are only a step from nearly impenetrable cover. In the second place, the hunter can often utilize some of the same cover to hide his stand from the view of the deer. My own favorite bow stand overlooks a small field at the



Using surrounding trees and vegetation to break up your outline and help you blend into the shadows is important on a bow stand, since you want the deer to get as close to you as possible.

Above: Photo by Dwight Dyke. Opposite: Photo by Bill Lea.

back of my property. There are big, open hardwoods on one side, but the area around the stand is thick with pine, gum, and tangled vines. The stand itself is recessed about 10 feet into the maze of vegetation. The deer seem to like to hang around the very edges of the woods, waiting for the light to wane before entering the field. The last buck I took off that stand was 12 feet away.

Light: If this seems an odd point to consider, it's because you never have sat on a stand squinting into the blinding glare of a setting (or rising) sun while waiting for deer to walk into view. If they walk in front of you, you will have the sun to contend with, and furthermore, the brilliant light will make your every move more visible. If they walk behind you, you will turn slowly and look helplessly at shadows, because sunspots are still dancing on your retinas. A little planning can eliminate this problem. Putting the stand where there is plenty of overhanging vegetation can help, even if the direc-

tion is toward the rising or setting sun.

Wind: There is a stand in the woods nearer the opposite end of the tiny field where my favorite stand is located, but I've never taken anything there with a bow. One reason is because I haven't hunted it as much, but another is because it is placed so that the prevailing winds of fall drift right across it and into the area from which deer are most likely to appear. Both food and cover are abundant around the stand, and deer trails are everywhere. In short, it looks good but it smells bad. I never use it anymore.

Portability: I thoroughly enjoy the comfort of a big, roomy, permanent stand, especially in rifle season. Like most of the other bowhunters I know, however, I see more game and get more shots from my portables. I own three, and I use them hard. One is an old climbing stand. Hunting out of it all day is not much more comfortable than sleeping on a bed of nails,

but it has certainly produced the shots for me. I use it to climb one tree in a close-growing clump of two or three trees. That way, I can lean against an adjacent trunk, and the extra trees help hide me. The other two portables are chain-on types requiring screw-in or strap-on steps. They are reasonably comfortable, they go up and take down fairly easily, and they almost disappear into the bark and foliage around them.

I don't know whether or not deer get suspicious of permanent stands and even portables that are left too long in one place or hunted too often in a season. I would not be surprised. I do know, though, that the animal's habits change as the season progresses. I like to be able to move a stand from a thicket near a soybean field early in the season to a grove of white oaks when the acorns start falling. There is a brushy hillside on a nearby farm that must be a sort of deer version of a singles bar, but the deer are there only after the rut begins.

The best stands for a bowhunter are simply those which cut down the number of things that can—and usually do—go wrong when he takes to the woods after deer. An errant puff of wind, the scrape of his jacket sleeve against a twig, a mosquito that demands his attention at exactly the wrong time, a foot which has gone dead asleep in its boot and must be moved, or just a deer with a burning curiosity to know the identity of that lump of camouflaged stuff in the tree before he goes back munching acorns—there are still plenty of things to blow your chances. Nevertheless, the hunter who pays close attention to the selection and placement of his stands, who spends enough time in the woods, and who is willing to change his stand when he has to, will have a much better than average shot at bringing home a deer in October. □

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Camo Mania

by Gerald Almy

Slipping like a gray ghost through the thick October woods, the four-point buck eases four steps, pauses, searches the habitat for danger, then continues on. He sees only brush and trees and leaves. All seems safe as he walks within 20 feet of the camo-clad hunter in the tree stand, pausing broadside in a small clearing amid the timber. Drawing back, the hunter releases his arrow.

Loud throaty gobbles echo through the spring forest as the tall red and blue headed tom marches down the oak flat toward the hen he thinks he hears yelping and clucking in the distance. Fifty yards from the source of the sound, he becomes suspicious because he can see no female turkey. But he sees no hunter either—only trees and rock and brush—and continues to approach another 15



Three types of camouflage allow the hunter to blend in better with different hunting environments.
Above: Photo by Lloyd B. Hill
Top: Realtree camouflage, good for waterfowl and cornfield dove hunting; photo by Gerald Almy.
Right: The wood turned in deer-horn quarry that's hard to find in the woods; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.



years back. It's no longer a simple matter of driving down to the corner sporting goods or hardware store and buying a pair of woodland or World War II pants and shirt. There are literally dozens of patterns on the market—some good, some bad, some applicable to Virginia hunting situations, others not. I've been fascinated with camouflage for years and perhaps some of my experiences with various patterns in different hunting situations can help you decide which designs are best for the types of hunting and environments you pursue your sport in.

First of all, let's consider when camouflage is and isn't of value as a hunting aid. My answer to this is that it's almost always of some help and sometimes is very helpful. About the only situations where camo is not useful is when hunting upland birds or rifle deer hunting. And many

yards as he stretches his long neck high searching for the hen. That is close enough for the hunter blending into a thick-girthed oak with his bark-like camouflage. Lining up the sight on his 12 gauge, he squeezes off the load of copper-plated c's.

Camo. It has become a virtual uniform for legions of hunters, particularly archers and those pursuing spring gobblers. It's clear that wearing camouflage clothing helped the hunters above bag their game (I know because I was that hunter). But there actually are many other situations where camouflage can help a person blend into the woods and increase his or her enjoyment of the sport.

With the explosion of new patterns being developed and design theories expounded, though, camouflage is a much more intricate and complex subject than it was just a few



hunters, myself included, still like to wear camo even when hunting deer with a gun, simply donning the required amount of blaze orange over top of it. This allows other hunters to see your upper torso and head, but allows the rest of you to blend in better with the surrounding habitat. In fact, wearing blaze orange over your camo is also a good safety idea when walking into or out of the woods or changing positions when turkey hunting, since camouflage is not

needed at these times. And tying in orange sash above your calling position while spring turkey hunting increases the safety of your stand.

Camouflage helps you achieve one of the major goals of hunting—becoming a part of the natural world by taking up the role of the predator. Thirty or 40 years ago camo wasn't as necessary and few people wore it. Game warden's as heavily pressured back then and perhaps not as wary. Today it's vital for most kinds of hunting.

But, choosing the best pattern and material can be tricky. So many designs flood the sporting goods shelves and pages of mail order catalogs that it seems a daunting task to choose the best one. But if you stop and think about it, the variety of hunting habitat we pursue our sport in may actually justify this multitude of patterns. Some of the more common settings include dove fields, late summer woods, autumn woods, winter woods, spring woods, snowy habitats, snowy mountain areas, deep lowland swamps, cumbered marshes and grain fields.

To help in choosing the best camo for these various situations, it helps to know something of the history of the material and how modern versions came about. Even more basic is an understanding of the purpose of camouflage.

Hunting camo should break up the solid image of a human you present. It does this by using various bloddy linear or leaf-shaped patterns to allow you to blend in with the surroundings so you are not visible to the wildlife you are hunting.

Camo allows you more time to look over the quarry and lets you approach it closer for a cleaner shot—with gun, bow or camera. Choosing the best camo thus means selecting a pattern that fits most accurately the topography and vegetation where you're hunting.

Some of the earliest camouflage used by Indians in this country was the skins of the animals they pursued. Instead of trying to blend with the background, they donned a deer or bumble hide and approached their quarry as if they were one of the herd.

More recently, hunters began donning camouflage developed for military purposes and using it to help them disappear in the woods as they pursued deer, turkey and waterfowl. The World War II pattern of oval and squiggly blobs of tan, brown and dark green was developed by a Belgian in 1942 and is among the most popular patterns of traditional camouflage. Another version was developed several decades later by the U.S. Army, called the Woodland. It has black, brown and two shades of green in a more erratic pattern with larger blocks of color, longer blobs and a less spotted look than the World War II version. It was developed as a mostly green pattern, but now is available from hunting clothing manufacturers in browner versions, to match the environment found during late fall hunting. A white, black and gray variety is also made for hunting in snowy woods.

Although they work surprisingly well for many types of hunting, there are several problems with the theory behind these types of camouflage. The first is that they were designed to fool human eyes, not game. They were never intended to totally conceal a person, but rather simply to break up the outline of the human form. Another problem is that all of them were designed for military use in other countries with different vegetation than the North American hunting terrain.

The first person to break out of this train of thought and develop a totally new version of camouflage was Virginia's own Jim Crumley. After years of experimenting and research he invented Trebark camo. It has revolutionized camouflage for hunting. Crumley's camo was invented strictly for hunting, with the typical Virginia woodlands the background he wanted to blend in with and game the eyes he wanted to fool—not enemy soldiers.

As a bow deer hunter and turkey hunter, Crumley had been dissatisfied with how the traditional World War II and Woodland camo patterns performed for him. "The camo available was strictly for military use in heavy jungle vegetation," Crumley said. "Yet, simply because it was

called 'camouflage,' I was wearing it to trick deer and turkeys."

In 1975, he began to design his own pattern that would make him less conspicuous in the woods. "I got particularly motivated when a deer nailed me even when I knew I hadn't moved and it had not smelled me," he said. "I began making doodle sketches that included traditional camouflage colors of brown and green in realistic leaf designs, as well as bark patterns and branch and twig designs.

"I abandoned the leaf pattern sketches because they were too seasonal. I gave up the branches because I felt it would be difficult to make a man look like a bunch of twigs. The decision to use the bark pattern was made because the human form lends itself well to it."

Crumley believed that the pattern should be black, gray and brown, since "these are the colors nature provides most often in birds and animals that depend on 'visual deceit' for survival."

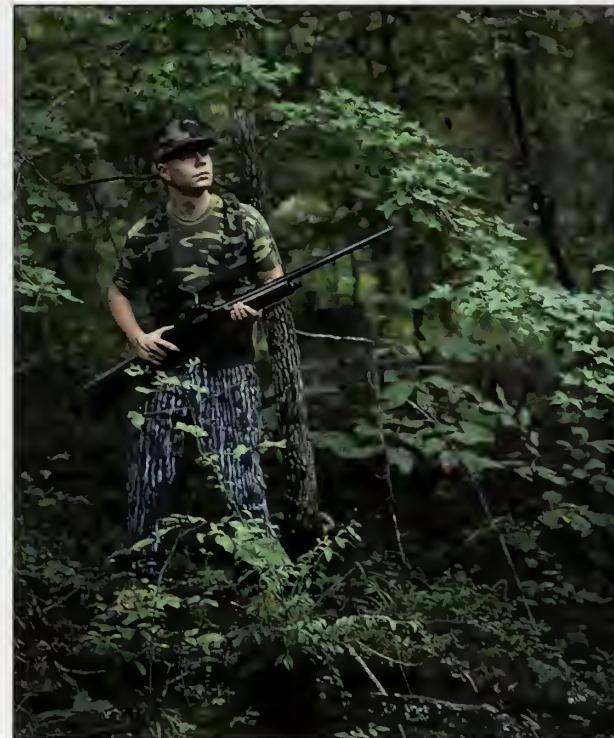
Trebark was revolutionary because of its colors—emphasizing gray, brown and black, and its linear design that blended in with tree trunks and rocks instead of leaves and bushes. It made sense logically, and it worked. Trebark quickly became one of the leading selling camouflage patterns. A number of other linear, tree-bark type designs soon followed from other companies, such as Shadowbark from Woolrich, Woodhide Bark from Browning, Up-A-Tree from Ranger, Kolpin's Natural Bark, Gander Mountain's Tree Camo, Mossy Oak, Bass Pro Shop's Tree Shadow, Camo Clan's Tree Stand Camo and Realtree, invented by Bill Jordan. If this wasn't enough, Camo Concepts of Pensacola, Florida, developed a new version last year called Pinetree Camo, aimed specifically at hunters pursuing their sport in softwood habitat.

But as popular as these linear tree-bark type patterns became in just a

few years, hunters still found they needed more varieties of camo. They complained to manufacturers that they weren't *always* in dark gray woods. During early fall bow hunting and late spring gobbler hunting, for instance, there's an incredible amount of leaves on saplings and brush.

To answer this need, several manufacturers began offering linear tree patterns with overlays of leaves. Realtree Regular Bark with Leaves, for example, has a bark pattern with "a broad arrangement of green and brown leaves, with black for shadow effect," according to its creator, Bill Jordan.

Mossy Oak developed Treestand and Full Foliage. The latter, according to spokesman Ronnie Strickland, "combines the original Mossy Oak



Above: Some hunters mix camo patterns for shirts and pants to achieve the effect of foliage above and tree trunk below; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.

Opposite top: The world of camouflage is diverse now, and the hunter does not need to be limited by just one type; photo by Gerald Almy. Opposite right: Camouflaging your face and hands is also important, and many hunters use face masks, cold-cream based face paints or new types of camouflage "dust" to do the trick; photo by Gerald Almy.



with an overlay of limbs, then adds a combination of large and small green leaves to create a pattern useful for spring or fall." Kelly Cooper created his Tru-Leaf Camo which features silk-screened beech, maple and oak leaves plus acorns and twigs.

Jim Crumley even added a Trebark with green leaves on it to his original offering, for those hunting late in the spring turkey season when new leaves are fully out. And unless you are sitting against a tree, the older Woodland and World War II patterns actually do surprisingly well in these situations and also in conifer woods, which stay mostly green year-round. A tactic I sometimes use is to wear a bark type camo for my pants and a leaf or Woodland pattern for my shirt, to look like the trunk of a tree and the foliage above it.

If you really want to look three-dimensional, several companies, including Spartan Realtree Products, Game Tracker, and the Neet Company offer pin-on leaves. These are non-glare plastic or polyester leaves that either pin or attach with Velcro to your clothing to give a more realistic look in the woods.

For waterfowl hunting, special patterns have been developed to allow you to blend in with reeds and marsh vegetation. Browning's Cattail camouflage is a tan, brown, beige and black linear pattern that features

contrasting tones that blend in well with marshes. Remington's waterfowl camo is called Marsh Grass. Columbia also offers an excellent waterfowl camo in its Delta Marsh. Besides working in wetlands, all of these patterns do surprisingly well in September dove fields, as do Trebark's tan and black offering and Realtree's Marshland Tan.

Besides clothing, your face and hands need to be camouflaged, too. Traditional cold cream-based face paints are used by many bow and turkey hunters, but lately I've switched to Tink's Camo Dust, a kit that includes brown, black, gray and green powders that you dab on with a small sponge included. Basically, you can just use the black for your nose, hands and cheeks and be hidden well enough, but the other colors are nice for effect. An easier option than either of these is to simply use a face mask and camouflage gloves.

A final consideration when choosing camo is what materials the clothing should be made of. Some people favor the new synthetics for hunting

such as Polarfleece, Supplex, and other brands. I'm a fan of natural materials myself, going with cotton and wool. I wear cotton camouflage in mild weather, wool over top of it if the air has a bite to it. Whatever material you select, however, just make sure it is warm enough, quiet in the woods, and durable.

In the end, choosing the best camouflage pattern for your hunting area boils down to analyzing and perhaps even photographing the surroundings where you usually hunt at different times of year, then choosing

the pattern that blends in best. You may find you need several sets—one for waterfowling, one for bow hunting deer and one for late spring turkey hunting. Or you may find just one pattern works well for all your hunting needs. But before simply picking up any old camouflage you see on the store shelf, analyze your hunting setup and make sure it's best for your situation. Chosen properly, camo can enhance the pleasure of the

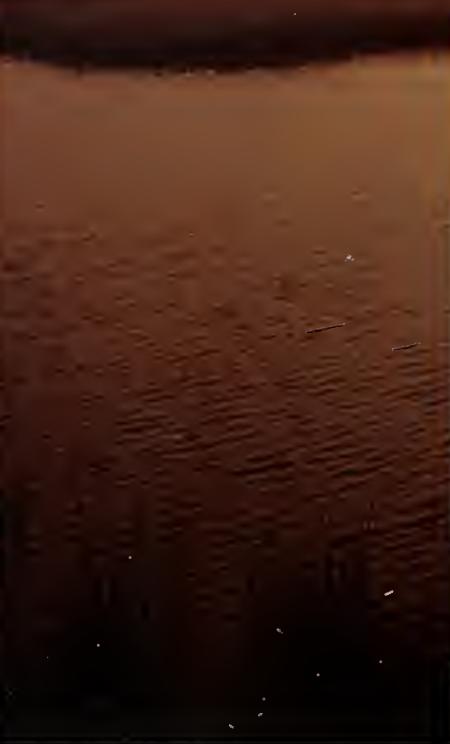
hunt by allowing you to blend in with your surroundings and become part of the natural world.

Be careful, though. The right camouflage can tragically change a terrific hunting tool into a deadly one in less than a second. With more and more hunters in the woods, it is imperative that you take safety precautions to avoid becoming the next victim in a hunting accident because you fooled human beings as well as game. Use camouflage wisely and in concert with blaze orange every time you go hunting, stress safety in every situation, and your camo may well give you the edge you're looking for in the field. □



Gerald Almy has been a full-time outdoor writer for 17 years. He is currently a hunting and fishing editor on the staff of Sports Afield magazine.

Marsh Hens and Moon



Hunting clapper rails is a sport governed by the moon and by tides. It's elemental hunting at its best.

by Curtis Badger

I was hunkered down in a honeysuckle thicket beneath a sweet gum tree, watching for doves but thinking of marsh hens. It was late afternoon and it had the makings of one of those classic doveless days. You begin with confidence, your body alert, your eyes constantly scanning the horizon. And then confidence slowly erodes into hope, hope downgrades to frustration, and

by 4:30 p.m. you're flinching each time a dragonfly appears in your peripheral vision.

I was looking at the moon and planning for a better day tomorrow. It was a fine, full moon, rising over the cornfield like a beacon, so intensely bright against the blue fall sky it looked surreal. I looked at the moon and thought of marsh hens. A full moon means high tides, and high tides bring those rare chances to go marsh henning. Marsh hens—clap-

Tides



per rails to purists—are birds of the coastal salt marshes, and for most of the year they are seldom seen, living their lives in the anonymity of the marsh, stalking grasshoppers and periwinkle snails in dense stands of cordgrass. But once or twice a month during the fall season, when the moon's gravity coaxes the tide higher into the marsh, the rails become vulnerable. The lower marsh is flooded, and instead of having hundreds of acres of grass in which to hide, the rails move to the few remaining high stands, mainly along

the edges of salt marsh guts.

These great gifts of moon phase—marsh henning tides—come only so often, and should not be taken lightly. As I watched the moon through the limbs of that sweet gum tree, I forgot about doves. You can hunt doves any time during the season. I wanted to go home and consult my tide book.

The tide book, known officially as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Tide Tables, gives the times of the daily tides for locations along the eastern coast of North and South America and Greenland (other volumes cover other areas). And equally important for those of us who hunt railbirds, it gives the predicted range of tides—how much higher or lower than mean low water the tide will be that day. Where I live on the Virginia coast, it takes a tide at least six feet above mean low water to cover the grass sufficiently to make a hunt possible. Less than that, and the marsh will be impenetrable, great expanses of grass will remain above water, and hunting rails will be akin to searching for the proverbial needle in a

stack of hay.

We need a six-foot tide, which is produced by the extremes of moon phase, full and new, when the pull of the moon's gravity is greatest, creating extremes of high and low tides. During the two-month Virginia season in 1991, we had exactly eight days in which the NOAA tables predicted six-foot tides. Of course, factors other than moon phase can bring high tides. Low barometric pressure adds a few inches, and a northeast wind can push even an average tide considerably above the six-foot mark. Conversely, a wind from the west can retard tide rise, actually pushing water away from the land while the gravity of the moon is trying to pull it in. So the NOAA tide book is a good starting point; you consult the book, then you tune in the weather forecast.

For the day following our doveless hunt, the NOAA tables forecast a six-foot tide, and that evening my friend Rick Kellam called to say that other factors looked favorable. Rick is an officer with the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and had spent the day on the water. The tide



Clapper rails are secretive birds of the coastal marsh, and for only a little more than a week a year are the conditions ripe for hunting them in the age-old fashion of poling a skiff through a salt marsh at high tide. Above left: The home of the clapper rail; photo by Dwight Dyke. Inset: Photo by Curtis Badger. Above: Clapper rail; photo by Rob Simpson.



A true test of hunting skills and endurance, the pursuit of the wily clapper rail through a salt marsh is wet, hard work. A good retriever is a welcome addition to the hunting party.
Top: Clapper rail; photo by Rob Simpson.
Above and below right: Photos by Curtis J. Badger.

had been high, and looked to be even higher the next morning, he said. Would I be interested in taking the day off to do some marsh henning?

For someone who grew up on the Virginia seaside, that's a rhetorical question. Marsh henning tides are important events, gifts from nature not to be squandered. My father used to take me out of school to take advantage of marsh henning tides. To not take the day off and go marsh henning would be counter to my upbringing; it would deny the history and traditions cultivated by many generations of coastal families. It was my responsibility to go, my duty. Besides, it had been a year since I'd had fried marsh hens, and I felt the need for this annual supplement to my diet.

So, early the next day Rick and I were in his little gunning skiff, puttering around the marsh well before the time of high tide, watching close-

ly the flow of the current, speculating whether it would make it high enough. By 9:30, the shortest stands of grass were covered, and the current was still running strong. It looked to be a good one.

It's illegal to hunt railbirds under motor power, so Rick tilted the outboard, picked up the long push-pole, and we headed across the flooded marsh toward a thick tump of high grass, a likely rail hiding place. As we approached the grass we scanned the open water beyond it, looking for the telltale wake of a swimming marsh hen. There was none.

But as we drew nearer to the tump, we noticed a slight movement of the blades of grass, just enough of a twitch to get our attention on a calm day. Rick pushed the skiff into the grass and two birds flushed. I shot, and as I did, three more took to the air. Rick had put down the push-pole and picked up his automatic, and he neatly took two of the three. I had one on the water, giving us three of the five, and with the tide still rising, we felt we could safely discuss the merits of a marsh hen dinner without unduly tempting the Fates.

How best to describe the taste of a railbird? Perhaps a cross between chicken and wild duck gives a good approximation. The rail has the wild flavor of a duck, but the meat is not as dark and the flavor is more subtle. Rails feed on everything from insects to aquatic life, so the flavor does have a hint of the salt marsh, but is not strong or fishy. The clapper rail is one of North America's largest rails, a gangly fellow with long legs, a long neck, and a bill designed for probing deep in the marsh mud. Unfortunately, the long bill and long legs are separated by an unsubstantial amount of rail flesh, so don't count on making a meal of a single marsh hen. We skin the birds, then separate the breast from the leg section, giving us two sizeable pieces of meat. We also keep the hearts, livers, and gizzards, all of which we consider delicacies. The gizzards are opened, and the contents and the tough linings are discarded before cooking.

I've prepared railbirds in a number of ways, but it seems to me the best method is the simplest. Dust the

pieces with flour seasoned with salt and pepper, and fry until just done. That's all there is to it. The good old down-home method is to serve them with mashed potatoes, fresh butter beans or turnip greens, and maybe a slice of cornbread. I also like mine with yams, or with Hayman potatoes, a locally grown sweet potato popular in eastern Virginia and North Carolina.

Rick and I were discussing the culinary values of marsh hens as we headed to another grassy tump, and we pretty much decided the birds are in a class by themselves. The rail is a marsh bird that has something of an upland palate, given its affinity for grasshoppers, so perhaps we could describe the flavor as that of a quail which has been feeding on periwinkle snails.

With the tide cresting at six feet above mean low water, we could pole Rick's little skiff over the high marsh, which was covered by about



a foot of water. The shorter stands of grass were covered, but the tall grasses along the edges of the creeks and guts were still well above water, and this is where the rails were hiding. Our hunting method was to pole the skiff across the marsh to a section of high grass and to flush any rails that might be hiding there. Frequently, the birds would swim away as the skiff approached, leaving behind a V-shaped wake. These birds would invariably be just out of gun range, leaving us to decide whether to charge across the marsh after the bird, or to concentrate on the nearby grasses and mark the escaping bird's location for future reference. Poling a small skiff is hard work, and as rails are surprisingly strong swimmers, we usually concentrated on the tumps of grass closest at hand. Like late-season quail, marsh hens will often hold their positions even as you approach; for each bird we flushed, we probably passed by two hun-

kered down in the grasses.

Standard hunting procedure calls for the shooter to man the bow of the boat, while the poler takes the stern. Usually, for reasons of safety, only one hunter will shoot at a time, although there are occasions, such as when Rick and I shot at the group of five rails, when both parties can safely shoot. On that occasion, we knew there were several birds in the cover, and we had time to get into position and plan our approach before flushing them. Standard practice, however, is for one person to pole while the other shoots, and then to switch roles.

Rail hunting is often wet work. Now and then it becomes necessary to wade after a downed bird, and sometimes we hunt the birds by walking the marsh, flushing them from dense stands of grass. Salt water is notoriously damaging to shotguns, so we usually use our older, cheaper models. The elegant,

fitted double guns that are the envy of your hunting partners should stay at home in the gun case. Bring something worthy of baptism in salt. I use an old 20-gauge double with 26-inch barrels, choked modified and improved cylinder. I use number 8 shot early in the season and 6's later in the year, when the birds are older and tougher.

Just as marsh henning days are governed by the tides, so too are the hunting hours. The tide peaked at 10:30, and an hour later the marsh was returning to normal, giving back to the rails their hiding places. But we had taken a total of 15 birds, shy of our limit of 15 per person, but sufficient for a marsh hen dinner, a proper ending for a marsh henning tide.

I suppose the things I love about marsh henning lie in the traditions, in the unchanging nature of the hunt, and in its total lack of pretense. Rail hunting is one of the few outdoor sports that has changed little in practice over the past century or two. While we now have outboard motors to get us to the marshes and back, the hunt must still be done from a skiff powered by human muscle. For those tempted to unsportingly run up on the hens with an outboard, heavy fines await.

There is something particularly satisfying about spending a morning on a flooded marsh, seated on a plank in an old cedar skiff, my old double across my lap, or standing in the stern with a slim oak push-pole in my hands. I enjoy the simplicity of it, the way it requires no elaborate equipment, no gadgetry. And I like being at the mercy of nature, depending upon the gifts of moon and tide for my supper.

Perhaps what I like most is the way marsh henning refocuses my life as a hunter, reminding me that the important things are the old skiffs my grandfather used, the hand-cut push-poles, and especially the sweet sanctity of tides and moon gravity. The marsh hens I'll have for dinner cannot be bought. They are nature's own gift, to be accepted humbly and with gratitude. □



Virginia's Other

For some Virginia hunters, fall means being in the mountains with early morning frosts, the brilliant colors of the changing autumn leaves, the clusters of ripe hickory nuts, acorns, and wild grapes hanging from every hardwood and vine in sight. From the die-hard grouse hunter to the once-a-year deer hunter, the highlands of western Virginia offer a wide variety of hunting opportunities. But many of these western visitors might be missing out on the fox squirrel, a worthy addition to their fall game bag.

Along with its smaller gray cousin, the fox squirrel, *Sciurus niger*, is the Old Dominion's most popular small game animal. Each year, thousands of hunters take to the fall woods, creeks, and bottomlands looking for Virginia bushytails. While most pursue the more abundant gray in the piedmont and lower-lying eastern parts of the state, some head west to the higher elevations in search of the scarcer fox, or redbell, as others like to call it. And while we've all seen squirrels in our nearby city parks and neighborhoods, most of us have probably

never really thought much about them. After all, a squirrel is a squirrel, isn't it? Red, gray, black, white, what's the difference?

In general, fox squirrels are much bigger than the more familiar and more frequently hunted gray squirrel. From tip of the head to tip of the tail, a large fox squirrel can measure up to 30 inches and weigh nearly three pounds. The gray, by comparison, rarely reaches 20 inches in length and one and one-half pounds in weight. The fox is also quite different in color. While the gray squirrel is usually a salt-and-pepper gray color



The fox squirrel found west of the Blue Ridge has a pale yellow to orange-colored belly, can measure up to 30 inches from head to tail, weigh up to three pounds, and generally prefers more open woods than its gray cousin; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.

Squirrel

by Ron W. Kokel

The fox squirrel may be a close cousin to the common gray squirrel, but as Virginia squirrel hunters know, that doesn't mean they look or act alike.

with a white belly, most redtails are a rusty yellowish with a pale yellow to orange belly and a bushy tail tipped a brownish orange to light brown. In some areas, fox squirrels may even be black.

The fox and gray also differ in their population characteristics. Studies have shown that fox squirrels typically have a home range of 10-40 acres with population densities of 0.5-3 three squirrels per acre. Compare this to the typical gray squirrel whose home range is only two to seven acres and who may typically share that area with two to 20 other

squirrels per acre. It's not hard to see that the larger redtail likes more elbow room.

Nests of both species are usually located in the cavity of a tree or built of twigs and leaves in the crotch of branches located 30 feet or more from the ground. Squirrels mate twice a year, usually around January and June in Virginia. A litter of two to five squirrels is born about 44 days later, and each is weaned at age two to three months. Both species can live in excess of 10 years, although the average life expectancy in the wild is much shorter. When trying to age a



Virginia's common gray squirrel rarely reaches 20 inches in length and one and one-half pounds in weight. The gray squirrel prefers dense forested areas with thick understories of shrubs, vegetation and young trees; photo by Steve M. Eberhardt.

squirrel, one quick way is to look at the tail. A young squirrel's tail will taper to a point, while an older one will be the same width throughout.

Some hunters have called the fox squirrel lazy, deliberate, and awkward when compared to its smaller more hardworking cousin. Whereas the gray is up at first light heading out to feed until mid-morning, and then feeding again in the late afternoon, the fox is a notorious late sleeper. Redtails often don't rise until an hour or so after dawn. They'll then feed and retire for the day early in the afternoon.

Probably the most important aspect to learn and remember when making the switch from the gray to the bigger fox squirrel is the different habitat preferences of the two species. While the two species may share the same range, they do not often share the same habitat. Unlike gray squirrels, fox squirrels don't like a crowded forest, probably because they spend so much of their time foraging on the ground for nuts, acorns, and seeds. The fox squirrel prefers a more park-like habitat with limited groundcover. When scouting for good fox squirrel areas, look for forest edges (transition areas where fields border on mature forests) and more open woodlots with interspersed clearings among older, more mature trees. In particular, areas such as abandoned and overgrown homesites or where old woodlots border cornfields can be especially productive. Fox squirrels are particularly fond of farm crops such as corn, and can cause some crop damage if left unchecked.

In contrast, gray squirrels are primarily arboreal creatures, which simply means they stick to trees, and they are seldom found far from them. They prefer dense bottomlands and forested areas with thick understories of shrubs, vegetation, and younger trees. Prime areas are those with a thick overstory canopy which allows this more acrobatic and agile species to easily travel through the treetops.

When scouting, be sure that you don't overlook areas that at first glance may look less than ideal or not



Camouflage is an asset to squirrel hunting (although blaze orange is advised for safety reasons and required during the general firearms deer season), and shotguns are often preferred while hunting fox squirrels, since they won't often "sit tight" for a still hunter; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.

Virginia counties open to fox squirrel hunting for the 1992 season



Map graphics by Pels

like your traditional gray squirrel areas. Some of my best fox squirrel hunts have occurred by slowly walking old fencelines that jut out from prime woodlots. The older trees that often times grow along old fencelines can serve as "fox squirrel highways" by providing quick and easy aerial access from larger and more secure woodlot areas to adjacent agricultural crop areas. Put another woodlot at the other end of the fenceline, and you've got a prime fox squirrel "highway."

If you find yourself hunting early in the season, be sure to scout for hickory trees or stands of black walnut. Often called "the beacon of the forest" because of its early fall color, the "sweet mast" of the hickory can be a real magnet for early fall squirrels. And the black walnut never fails to attract a few nearby redtails. Oftentimes, a limit can be filled by simply hunting one or two of these well-placed trees.

No discussion of fox squirrel hunting would be complete without the mention of float hunting. The areas along Virginia's numerous creeks, streams, and rivers in the Appalachian valleys can be phenomenal for big fox squirrels that like the large overhanging trees growing along the stream banks, especially if they happen to border on a cornfield. The usual (and safe) technique is for

one hunter to ride in the bow ready to shoot while the other hunter handles the boat. Try to hug the shoreline and use stream bends to surprise any unsuspecting redtails. Also remember that squirrels will frequent water after feeding, so adjust your hunting time appropriately for redtails. However, be sure to obtain the landowner's permission if you're floating through private property.

As for other, more general tips, there are virtually hundreds to pick and choose from. The hard part is sorting through all of them and finding something that you can both use and believe in. This is not an easy task.

However, now after years of hunting alongside some of the self-proclaimed "best" fox squirrel hunters, there probably isn't a story, tip, lie, or secret method that I haven't heard quoted as the gospel truth:

- "Best hunting is in the morning."
- "Best hunting is in the afternoon."
- "Find a good place and stay put."
- "Still-hunt with two people."
- "Hunt before a rain."
- "Hunt after a rain."

As you can see, for someone just starting out, these so-called "tips" can often be confusing and sometimes even plain contradictory. To help you sort through the confusion, here are a few of the more helpful, and usually reliable, suggestions I've

found useful in my hunting:

- **Use your eyes and ears.** All squirrels make some very distinctive noises—such as scratching their claws on bark, and rustling leaves. A good hunter learns to recognize these noises. Also, look for movement—a slight flash out of the corner of the eye or a fluttering tail. Rarely will you see the whole squirrel. Find the movement first, and the squirrel usually follows.

- **Hunt into the sun.** Although to most hunters this sounds contradictory to everything they've learned about most kinds of hunting, squirrels and their movements are much easier to spot when silhouetted. Also, by standing and moving in a tree's shadow, you're provided with concealment cover.

- **Wear camouflage.** A good fall-based camouflage will do wonders for both your confidence and your success.

- **Avoid the wind.** Squirrels, like most other wild creatures, rely on their eyes and ears for protection from predators. Windy conditions hinder both a squirrel's ability to see movement, since everything is moving when it's windy, and its ability to hear danger. With this in mind, it seems reasonable to assume that if you couldn't see or hear your predators very well, you would stay home where it was safe. So it is with squirrels.

- **Keep an eye on the mast crop.**

In years when the mast crop (acorns and other nuts) is reduced, the remaining squirrels may have to travel farther from their nests to find sufficient amounts of food. This is especially true for fox squirrels who already travel quite a bit. Increased travel activity can translate into opportunities for hunters. Conversely, however, in years with bumper crops of mast, squirrels may not have to travel outside of their own tree's shadow.

• **Hunt after a rain.** One of the best times to hunt is in the morning after a night of slow steady rain. The rain will dampen your footsteps, and squirrels will often be more active.

• **Don't be overanxious.** Often-times when hunting a small area, you can increase the weight of your game bag if you don't move around too much. Simply find a good vantage point at the base of a tree where you can keep an eye on several likely-looking spots and stay put. After taking a squirrel, watch closely as it hits the ground. Making sure it's dead, note its location and remain still. More often than not after a short wait, another will make his presence known. Getting up and retrieving your fallen game only disturbs the entire area. Surprisingly, gun shots are only a temporary and minor disturbance to most game.

• **Look for cuttings.** These are nut fragments dropped on the ground beneath nut trees by feeding squirrels.

As far as equipment needs go, the list is relatively simple, unlike a lot of types of hunting these days (in particular, waterfowl and deer hunting, as my closets, garage, wallet, and wife will attest to). The consensus among most fox squirrel hunters seems to be a 12-gauge modified-choke shotgun loaded with either No. 4 or No. 6 shot. For those purists who prefer rifles, a well sighted-in .22 handles the job quite well. However, for fox squirrels it's important to remember that rarely will an alerted big redbird choose to freeze and flatten against the bark like a gray squirrel. The fox likes to run. Thus, a moving hunter who is stalking or still-hunting may wish to opt for the

shotgun. Other equipment items that come in handy include a head net and small seat cushion for stand hunting and a good pair of boots for both traction and all-day comfort.

It's also important to remember that fox squirrels are legal game only in counties west of the Blue Ridge and in Fairfax, Fauquier (except on the C.F. Phelps WMA), Loudoun, and Rappahannock counties. Contained within this area, however, is much of the George Washington and



Fox squirrels roam larger areas than gray squirrels and tend to need more elbow room than their gray cousins who live 2-20 squirrels per acre; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.

Jefferson National Forests. Administered by the U.S. Forest Service, there is over 1.6 million acres of public land in these two forests with much of it consisting of mature hardwood stands.

In addition, don't overlook the state's wildlife management areas (WMAs). These areas are specifically set aside and managed by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for both Virginia's wild game and Virginia's hunters. A few you should be sure to check out include: Highland WMA (Highland County), Goshen/Little North Mountain WMA (Augusta and Rockbridge Counties), Clinch Mountain WMA (Tazewell and Smyth Counties), Thompson WMA (Fauquier County), Gathright WMA

(Bath County), Hidden Valley WMA (Washington County), Crooked Creek WMA (Carroll County), and Havens WMA (northwest of Roanoke-Salem).

Finally, when it comes to the table, fox squirrels offer versatile and tasty table fare. However, squirrels can be particularly susceptible to off-tastes, so it's important to remember that excellent eating first begins with the proper field care of your game. If possible, you should field dress or clean your game shortly after it is taken. This is usually done for several reasons. First, fresh game (especially squirrels) is much easier to skin. And second, field dressing your game allows the meat to cool quickly, thus eliminating many of the potential sources of unpleasant tastes. Be sure to start with a sharp knife (sharp knives offer more control and require less pressure to do the job) and remember to wear rubber gloves when dressing or skinning any small game. Most of the transmittable diseases carried by wild game are transferred by handling the animal's entrails or uncooked meat. So don't touch your mouth or eyes until you've washed your hands thoroughly.

After cleaning, the next step is to cool the game properly. One of the worst mistakes a well-intentioned hunter can make is to take the time to properly dress out game and then put it in a hot car or carry it in their game pouch all day. An even worse mistake is to put unchilled game in a closed-up plastic bag. To ensure the best flavor possible, I like to carry a small ice cooler with me, especially in warm weather. Not only does it serve as my game cooler, but it carries a few cold drinks for the end of the hunt.

Hopefully, you've now gained a little better understanding of Virginia's "other" squirrel. So this fall, try something different when it comes to squirrel hunting. Head west to the autumn-colored woods of Virginia's Blue Ridge and Appalachian Mountains and the home of Virginia's other squirrel. □

Ron Kokel is a wildlife biologist living in Washington, D.C.

Help Virginia's Homeless...

Many of Virginia's fish and wildlife species are losing their homes everyday to toxic chemicals, bulldozers, and plain alteration of habitat, both here and in their winter ranges. They have nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, and they simply perish. Here at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, we are responsible for the protection and conservation of these birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. Help us fund critical research and management programs to better understand and protect these rare and wonderful creatures that share this land and water with us by contributing to our Nongame Wildlife Fund which is supported solely through voluntary contributions made through our state tax checkoff program and direct giving.

To make a donation, simply send your tax-deductible check (made payable to the Treasurer of Virginia) to: Virginia Nongame Wildlife Fund, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.



Red-tailed hawk; photo by Bill Portlock.

Buy one for a Song



The cheerful *chip, chip, chip, da-a, te-dee* of the Bewick's wren is seldom heard in the mountains of Virginia anymore. Declared endangered in Virginia, the Bewick's wren represents just one of many species of wildlife whose survival is hanging by a thread in our state today.

Thus, David Turner of Turner Sculpture has designed this delicate 12-inch high bronze sculpture to draw attention to the beauty and fragility of the Commonwealth's wildlife in an effort to help save them. The enchanting Bewick's wren is perched atop a limb that pokes up from a forest floor strewn with morels and a single rare Virginia round-leaf birch leaf.

A limited edition of 200 of these bronze sculptures will be cast and sold by Turner Sculpture solely to benefit Virginia's Nongame and Endangered Species Program, the program responsible for the management and protection of all the Commonwealth's rare and endangered wildlife. The money raised from the

sale of this sculpture will provide the program with 1/10th of its present operating budget.

Of the \$325 purchase price, Turner Sculpture will receive \$175 to cover their production costs. The remaining \$150 will be sent to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries as your contribution to Virginia's Nongame and Endangered Species Fund. A tax advisor should be consulted regarding the personal tax deductibility of this contribution. Each piece sold will include a certificate of origin and a letter confirming your contribution to the future of Virginia's wildlife.

Order your sculpture by sending a \$325 check made out to Turner Sculpture to: Turner Sculpture, Box 128, Onley, VA 23418. For credit card orders, call: (804) 787-2818.



TURNER
SCULPTURE





Journal

Running Wild— A Race to Benefit Wildlife

Join the fun! "Running Wild" is a series of 5K and 10K cross-country foot races sponsored by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to benefit nongame and endangered species in Virginia. With the help of Contel Cellular, Safway Scaffolding, Pioneer Electronics, Polar Water, and Vatex, a 5K and 10K race has been scheduled at C. F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area on October 18th, located in Fauquier and Culpeper counties northwest of Fredericksburg. On October 25th, a 5K and 10K race will take place at the Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area located on the eastern edge of Charles City County. On November 22nd, a 5K and 10K race will take place at the Fairy Stone Farms Wildlife Management Area located in Patrick and Henry Counties. On December 6th, a 5K and 10K race will take place at the Powhatan Wildlife Management Area in Powhatan County.

There will be cash donations to the Nongame Fund in the name of the first three overall winners in the male and female categories. Teams and individuals are encouraged to compete. There will be a special "Running Wild Challenge" event for teams with the three lowest cumulative times in the 5K event. The entry fee for each race is \$20 for individuals and \$10 per team member, per race. T-shirts will be given to all pre-registered entries. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. Races begin at 10:00 a.m. Proceeds from these races will benefit the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Nongame Wildlife Fund. For more information, please contact Ed Phillips at Classic Production, Inc., P.O. Box 1687, Midlothian, VA 23113. 804 744-5969. □

Letters

Bells for Cats?

As a wildlife enthusiast I greatly appreciated your article in the June issue concerning the detrimental effects of introduced species into Virginia's ecosystem. The amount of wildlife cats destroy and the competition they produce for native predators is appalling. But instead of just worrying the cat owners and nature enthusiasts, wouldn't it be helpful to suggest some solutions to this problem? Now I read the part that said bells on cats' collars don't work, but I have witnessed many times that a cat with a bell sneaked up on a bird and the bell scared the bird away just in time. Don't you think just cutting down the numbers of kills a little would be better than nothing? Therefore, I recommend you put a warning in your magazine about the cats and say that bells do help *some* and can be bought at the local pet store. I believe many people would do this. They just need to be guided and reminded. Until a better solution is found, I think this can be a simple and possible one.

Murray Fisher
Manakin

Kudos

My wife and I are thrilled to be subscribers to *Virginia Wildlife*. As a printer I admire the consistent quality of the four-color work and as a hunter and fisherman I enjoy the stories, tips and recipes. My wife craves the emotional harmony evoked by seeing the pictures and reading the stories on wildlife and wild flowers. Keep it coming.

Chris McArdle
Winchester

My compliments and admiration for the excellence of the *Virginia Wildlife* magazine, which I look forward to receiving each month.

Harvey M. Krassoy
Arlington

Good Books

Some of us at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries have thrown together a list of our favorites:

Stories of the Old Duck Hunters and Other Drivel, by Gordon MacQuarrie, Willow Creek Press, 1985.

More Stories of the Old Duck Hunters, by Gordon MacQuarrie, Willow Creek Press, 1983.

Last Stories of the Old Duck Hunters, by Gordon MacQuarrie, Willow Creek Press, 1985.

MacQuarrie Miscellany, by Gordon MacQuarrie, Willow Creek Press, 1987.

These MacQuarrie books are simply treasures for anyone in love with waterfowling and the outdoors. Written during the 30s, 40s, and 50s primarily for the Milwaukee Journal and Sports Afield, they will make you laugh and cry and marvel over MacQuarrie's superb writing.

The Wingless Crow, by Charles Fergus, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Dept. AR, 2001 Elmerton Ave., Harrisburg, PA 17110-9797, \$10. This is a wonderful collection of 33 essays about the outdoors by Chuck Fergus, originally written as his regular "Thornapples" column in *Pennsylvania Game News*.

New books: Some recently published books have come across our desk:

Gun Clubs and Decoys of Back Bay and Currituck Sound, by Archie Johnson and Bud Coppedge, CurBac Press, P.O. Box 1086, Virginia Beach, VA 23451, \$43.50 plus tax. In 223 pages, this book identifies and presents a photographic history of over 100 hunting clubs and lodges on Back Bay and Currituck Sound active during the early 1900s.

Grasses, An Identification Guide, by Lauren Brown, Houghton Mifflin, 1992. With over 385 drawings, this identification guide focuses on the color, shape and texture of the plants and covers 135 species.



Hunter Safety News

Volunteers— Where would we be without them?

Hunter education courses are now in full swing. Since 1988 all first-time hunters and those between 12 and 15 years of age have been required to complete our 10-hour hunter education course offered free by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries with the invaluable help of over 1200 volunteer instructors around the state. Our volunteer instructors are the Virginia Hunter Education program, for without them the Game Department simply would be unable to handle the 23,000 students coming through our courses each year. They are responsible for scheduling and teaching the courses, and they themselves have gone through intensive training to prepare themselves for their responsibility to our future hunters.

If you are interested in becoming one of this select group of hunter education professional volunteers or need information on any of the hunter education courses going on throughout the state, please contact the office closest to you below:

Richmond: 804/367-1000
Williamsburg: 804/253-7072
Lynchburg: 703/525-7522
Marion: 703/783-6185
Staunton: 703/332-9210
Fredericksburg: 703/899-4169



We trained over 23,000 young hunters last year in hunter safety, a feat which could never have been accomplished without the help of over 1200 volunteer instructors statewide. Instructors are rigorously trained in hunting safety by our game wardens and other experts in such areas as shotgun, rifle, archery, handgun, ethics, and outdoor survival. Below: Mrs. Joyce D. Shorter of Gladys, VA teaches hunter education along with her husband, Morrell; photo by Virginia Shepherd. Above: Game warden Terry Bradberry teaches a student the proper handling of a shotgun; photo by Lee Walker.

Hunting Accidents: Solving the Question, "Why?"

Last year, five hunters died as the result of hunting accidents and 72 hunters were injured. Understanding the causes of these accidents is crucial to preventing such tragedies in the future and to safeguarding the future of hunting itself.

As a result, our law enforcement division is stepping up its training in hunter accident investigation techniques. Last fall, Homer Moe, one of the country's premier investigators of hunting accidents, trained a core group of game wardens in the techniques of hunter accident investigation he has used over the years to thoroughly understand the causes of such accidents. Moe emphasized the point that unlike traditional crimes or violations, the true causes of hunting accidents might be less vigorous-

ly pursued out of compassion for the victims and their families. Yet, it is vital to fully investigate each accident, not only in an effort to understand how to prevent such an accident in the future, but also to remove any possibility of foul play.

Sifting through the facts of these accidents, therefore, requires a high degree of skill and training. With the help of simulated accident situations, Moe led the game wardens through the investigation process, pointing out how easily vital facts to understanding the causes of an accident can be overlooked, how the media and the public must be handled, and how evidence must be carefully collected and recorded.

As a result of this workshop, all game wardens throughout the state will be trained in the techniques of hunter accident investigation, bringing us one step closer to preventing such tragedies in the future and ensuring our hunting heritage. □

By Joan Cone

Quail for Fall Dining

There were bobwhite in Virginia long before our ancestors arrived, and they will probably remain until our state is totally covered with pavement. Like other wildlife species, there are population booms and busts, and quail shooting today is not nearly as good as it was a few seasons past. Hopefully, they will return, and meanwhile a good dog and stocked birds on a licensed preserve can help make up for the continuing shortage of wild quail.

No matter whether they are wild or pen-raised, bobwhite quail are truly delicious. You can insure they come to the table in first-rate condition by cleaning them promptly while still afield. Carrying a warm, gut-shot bird in an airtight game jacket does nothing to improve flavor, while cleaning takes only a few seconds.

Menu

*Creamy Mushroom Soup
Quail with Port Wine Sauce
Ruthie's Vegetable Pancakes
Chef Mike Jones' Salad
Perfect Cherry Pie*

Creamy Mushroom Soup

1 can (4 ounces) sliced mushrooms, drained, reserving liquid
2 tablespoons chopped onion
2 tablespoons margarine or butter
1/4 cup flour
2 beef bouillon cubes
Hot water
1/4 teaspoon basil
1 bay leaf
Dash pepper
1 cup half and half or milk

In medium saucepan, sauté mushrooms and onion in margarine until onion is tender. Stir in flour until well blended. Add hot water to reserved mushroom mixture. Stir in basil, bay leaf and pepper. Cook and stir until slightly thickened. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 10 minutes. Re-

move bay leaf. Add half and half; cook until heated through. Makes 4 (1 cup) servings.

Quail with Port Wine Sauce

4 to 6 quail, left whole with skin on and split down back
1/4 cup flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons margarine or butter
3/4 cup beef broth
1/4 cup port wine
3 whole cloves
2 tablespoons raisins
1 to 2 tablespoons cornstarch

Dust birds with flour to which salt has been added. In a large frying pan melt butter. Add birds, breast side down first, and brown on all sides. Arrange birds breast side up in skillet. Add broth, port, cloves and raisins. Bring to boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer until birds are fork tender, about 20 to 30 minutes. Discard cloves. Thicken drippings in pan with cornstarch dissolved in small amount of cold water. Serve gravy over birds. Allow 2 quail per serving.

Ruthie's Vegetable Pancakes

My college classmate and long-time friend, Ruthie Bachman of Pittsburgh, PA sent me this unique and delicious recipe.

1 cup chopped cabbage
3/4 cup chopped scallions
1 cup grated carrot
1/2 cup chopped water chestnuts
3 eggs lightly beaten or 3/4 cup egg substitute
1/2 cup flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds
Peanut or vegetable oil for frying
Place first ingredients in a large bowl. In a medium bowl, whisk eggs, flour, baking powder and soy sauce until smooth; mix in sesame seeds. Pour egg mixture into chopped veg-

etables and mix well. Place enough oil into a skillet to cover bottom. Pour 1/4 cup batter per pancake into hot oil and flatten slightly. Brown on both sides. Makes 12 pancakes.

Chef Mike Jones' Salad

Recently we were guests of Chef Mike Jones at his marvelous restaurant, Lilfred's in Rembert, South Carolina. One of the six courses served us was a quail with this salad.

Salad

1/2 red or green leaf lettuce and
1/2 romaine lettuce

1 yellow and 1 red pepper

Vinaigrette

1/4 cup olive oil
1/4 cup sherry vinegar
2 small shallots, minced
1 small garlic, minced
1/4 teaspoon ground mustard
1/4 teaspoon white pepper
1/4 teaspoon salt

Mix all vinaigrette ingredients together except the oil. Allow the salt to dissolve, then whisk in the oil. Quarter the peppers, lay flat with skin side down. With a sharp paring knife remove the skin. Then julienne finely. Toss salad with vinaigrette and sprinkle julienne of peppers on top.

Perfect Cherry Pie

1/2 cup cherry juice
3/4 cup sugar
2-1/2 tablespoons cornstarch
1/8 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons margarine or butter
Few drops red food coloring
2 cups pitted sour cherries
(1 No. 2 can)

1 recipe your favorite pastry for pie

Combine juice, sugar, cornstarch and salt in a small saucepan. Cook until thick; add butter and food coloring. Pour over cherries in 8-inch pastry-lined pie pan. Make lattice top and flute edge. Bake in hot oven (400 degrees) for 45 minutes to 1 hour. Makes 8 servings. □

Photo TipS

By Lynda Richardson

As the reds and yellows of autumn wash over the land, my mind turns to mountains and hikes along rocky ridges searching for black bear and grouse. But in years past, my shoulders and back were not so eager for such endeavors. Their memories were filled with bleak discomfort and hours spent in steamy baths to ease great pain: pain caused by heavy camera bags carried for miles, alternately from one shoulder to the other.

About the time I was seriously looking into buying a llama or pack horse, a friend of mine told me about his photo backpack. I was already pretty leery of using packs for photo equipment. A trip to the high peaks of Colorado with a backpack had nearly been the death of me. Without anything to hold equipment in place, lenses and camera bodies always traveled to the bottom of the pack. This made for a frustrating game of hide and seek followed by a ceremonial dumping of the entire contents of the pack. Needless to say, my friend's pack had better be good.

And it was! This pack, like many of the new photo backpacks on the market in recent years, is specifically designed with photographers in mind. Companies such as LowePro and Tenba have combined the idea of camping backpacks and shoulder camera bags to create an ideal carry-all for the equipment-burdened wildlife photographer.

A pack I ended up purchasing was the Tenba PBL: Large Photo Back Pak.

One entire side zips open for easy access to anything you have packed. Inside, the wonders of Velcro provide a honeycomb of padded dividers to accommodate any size lens. But what makes Tenba packs different from other photo packs on the market are the accessories available. For instance, I wanted to carry my

Pack It Up This Fall

long 500mm f4.5 lens, but it didn't quite fit with the dividers normally sold with the pack. No problem. I just ordered the special 16-inch dividers and it fit perfectly.

Another accessory of Tenba's which I really like is the Film Cooler Pockets with refreezable "ice pillows." Available in two sizes to fit outside pockets among several models, these handy film carriers are especially nice for keeping film cool when traveling over warm terrain. At airport security, the pockets can easily be removed and replaced while hand-checking film past dangerous X-rays.

Photo backpacks are the ticket for ease in air travel. With new rules limiting carry-on luggage, it's essential for everything to store as one unit and fit into overhead compartments. Designers had this in mind when they created photo backpacks. My Tenba PBL slips easily into overhead storage and can carry enough gear and film that, if all my luggage is lost, I can still complete an assignment.

And I'm talking about loads of stuff! When packed to the hilt, I had my 500mm f4.5 lens, a Canon F-1 camera with motor drive, T-90 camera, five additional lenses, two flashes with external battery packs, light meter, extra batteries, cords, lens paper, notebooks, pens, flashlight, and about 80 rolls of film all within easy reach.

But, wait a second. With all this camera gear still on your back and shoulders, how is it any better for those tired, aching muscles? Because the design is based on regular backpacks, it is made for comfortable hiking over miles of rugged terrain. With the added feature of side zipper and storage pockets, weight is evenly distributed and access to gear is quick. Another added feature that Tenba can provide is a weight-bearing Padded Hip Belt. This black belt might not look like much, but it takes much of the load off the shoulders and back and spreads it comfortably



photo by Tim Wright



photo by Tim Wright

When packed to the hilt, I had my 500mm f4.5 lens, a Canon F-1 camera with motor drive, T-90 camera, five additional lenses, two flashes with external battery packs, light meter, extra batteries, cords, lens paper, notebooks, pens, flashlight, and about 80 rolls of film, all within easy reach.

along your hips. I can stand or hike for long periods of time without any discomfort. One warning, though. You might want to carry an extra set of belt clips as they are plastic and can break, leaving you without use of the weight-distributing belt.

Depending on your needs, there are photo packs in sizes available from fanny and tummy photo packs for single camera/lens combinations to huge backpacks which can carry the full regalia of 4X5 camera equipment!

So, if you hear the rustle of autumn calling and want to search the hills for black bear and grouse, give a photo backpack a try. Your body will thank you for it. □

HABITAT

by Nancy Hugo

Mulleins

There are two mulleins in Virginia that I'd like to call your attention to so that you can tell them apart and appreciate them both. Actually, telling them apart is easy—they don't look much alike, but the similarity of their names is confusing.

Common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) is a wildflower that blooms from midsummer to early fall along roadsides and in other disturbed soils all over Virginia. It has unmistakable big, woolly, gray-green leaves that form cabbage-like rosettes during the plant's first year of growth. The next year, the plant sends up a massive (3-8') flowering stalk on which more of these flannelly leaves ascend and at the top of which yellow flowers bloom a few at a time in a terminal spike.

The piece of common mullein lore I'm currently fascinated with is the plant's use by native Americans to stun fish. Evidently, parts of some plants (red buckeye nuts, chinaberry bark, and common mullein seeds among them) contain ingredients that work like organic poisons to attack a fish's nervous system and produce a stupefying effect. Native Americans reportedly made potions of these plants and threw them on the water to momentarily stun fish. The fish could then be gathered by hand and revived in fresh water.

Moth mullein (right; photo by Gary Sargent) resembles hollyhock with yellow or white flowers blooming on 2-4 foot tapering stems. Common mullein (middle and far right; photos by Hal Horwitz), on the other hand, sends up an unmistakable 3-8 foot flowering stalk framed by gray-green woolly leaves.

Other uses for common mullein are equally interesting. The plant is an alien, introduced to this country from Europe, and its uses date back to the Roman empire. Roman soldiers reportedly dipped common mullein stalks in tallow and lit them to use as torches, and Roman ladies used a yellow dye derived from mullein leaves to color their hair. Native Americans used mullein leaves to line their moccasins. Quaker rouge, one of common mullein's many common names, suggests another use to which the plant was once put: Quaker ladies, forbidden by their religion to use cosmetics, rubbed woolly mullein leaves on their cheeks to make them rosy.

For all its uses and uncommon beauty, however, I still think of common mullein as a coarse plant compared with its more delicate cousin, moth mullein, which I really love. Moth mullein (*Verbascum blattaria*) has 1" yellow or white five-petaled blooms that line 2-4' tapering stems. More than one visitor to my wildflower garden has thought moth mullein was a miniature hollyhock. The stamens of moth mullein flowers are all lined with purplish hairs and tipped with orange anthers. According to some writers, it is the resemblance of these stamens to moth antennae that accounts for the "moth"

in moth mullein's name, but since the flowers are actually pollinated by moths, that could explain the plant's name, too.

My *Atlas of Virginia Flora* tells me moth mullein grows in almost every Virginia county. Look for it in old fields and along roadsides from June to September. It's a lovely thing when it's in bloom and even the small round green capsules that follow the seeds are pretty. Once the seed pods have turned deep brown, you can split a few open, gather the mature seeds, and scatter them wherever you'd like them to grow. In my garden, spikes of moth mullein pop up like geysers all over the place, and, no matter how inappropriate they look, I can't bring myself to pull them until they've bloomed. I do sometimes cut them for flower arrangements, however, and that's a practice that has brought me into intimate acquaintance with the fragrance of the leaves, which endears the plant to me even more.

Even common mullein is showing up in fancy gardens these days (designers love its woolly gray-green leaves). I've read that its seeds, protected in egg shaped capsules, are sometimes eaten in the winter by birds, so you can delight your eye as well as your birds by adding these striking wildflowers to your garden.



By Spike Knuth

Everybody Wins

What do you do if groundhogs are burrowing under and into storage bunkers where high explosives are stored and voles and mice are scurrying in and around buildings where explosives are produced?

This was the problem facing Terry Thompson in the Natural Resources Office of the Hercules Company at its Dublin Plant of the Radford Army Ammunition Plant (RAAP). The company and the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) have worked cooperatively for many years in managing wildlife on the company's lands, so Thompson looked to Larry Crane, VDGIF Special Projects Wildlife Biologist, for assistance.

Crane had an idea. He had been working in close coordination with Dr. Stuart Porter of the Wildlife Center of Virginia, Weyers Cave, in the releasing of rehabilitated wildlife back into the wilds where they belong. It occurred to Crane that RAAP land would be an excellent release site for the birds and mammals that had been nursed back to health or raised to maturity in captivity.

Since human activity is tightly controlled, the refuge-like 3000 acres of RAAP would provide an excellent situation for critters to safely adjust to the wild. Here the hawks, owls, and foxes could perform their natural predatory functions by feeding on the groundhogs, voles and mice, thereby controlling their populations. It's a part of what is known as Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Rather than using poisons, IPM encourages the use of traps, crop rotation and natural biological control to keep rodents in check.

Last July, I had an opportunity to visit the Wildlife Center to pick up a pair of kestrels, a great-horned owl

and four young red foxes for release at Radford. The Center is made up of two mobile homes literally crammed full of desks, shelves, files, cages, medical equipment and supplies, and animal food. Outside behind them are numerous cages and pens housing foxes, deer, eagles, owls, hawks, vultures along with other birds and mammals, even turtles.

The Wildlife Center, I learned, was founded over a cup of coffee in October, 1982 by Ed Clark, Jr., now president/director, and Dr. Stuart Porter. It began as a hospital for native animals. Hundreds of orphaned, sick or injured animals have been reared or nursed back to health and released back into natural habitats when possible. The Center is tied closely to veterinarian offices and licensed rehabilitators.

Since its founding, the Center has evolved into a research and education organization as well, with an interest and influence in a broad range of environmental issues. Additionally, the Center also offers an opportunity for hands-on experience in native wild animal treatment to veterinary students across the country.

In fact, the Center has grown to a point where a new, modern center is being built on an eight-acre wooded site donated by the DuPont Company in Waynesboro, adjacent to a 400-acre tract of the George Washington National Forest. The complex is scheduled for completion in late 1993. The multimillion-dollar center will include a research and veterinary hospital for wildlife and an educational facility for the public. The hospital and research center are being financed by private donations with possible federal money for the educational center.

As I waited, Dr. Porter and his staff captured the animals to be transport-

ed from their pens, placed them in cardboard carrying cases and loaded them into my vehicle. After a two and a half hour trip to Dublin, I met Crane at about 11:30 a.m. and checked through security at RAAP.

Within an hour, the critters were released one by one by Crane into a lush, green, grassy clearing between tall stands of pine and shrubby undergrowth. The foxes were especially comical at first, seemingly confused by their sudden freedom and the tall grasses tickling their undersides. The kestrels flew off strongly, uttering their familiar cries. They landed briefly in the pines, got their bearings and flew off. The great-horned owl also flew off with strong wingbeats and immediately attracted the attention of a crowd of crows. (One of the indignities owls in the wild must suffer). As we left the area, the foxes were seen bounding and cavorting like little puppies through the clearing and along the stand of pines.

To date, six kestrels, three great-horned owls, three barred owls, a couple of barn owls and nine red foxes have been released at Radford Arsenal. "The beauty of it," says Crane, is that "few man hours are expended and no poisons are used. While it's not a sure thing, the most we have to do is to provide nesting boxes for the hawks and owls to encourage them to stay around and maintain and increase their populations."

Additionally, the hard work by the Wildlife Center staff and its many volunteers is rewarded by the useful placement of their former "patients" to live out their lives performing their natural functions. The Hercules Company provides a safe place to release the animals and derives the benefit of natural control of its rodent problem. □

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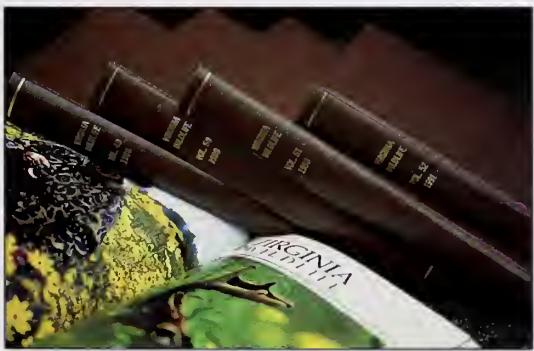


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